

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel Claims 2, 3, and 15 without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter. Please amend Claims 1 and 4, and add new Claims 17 and 18, as shown below.

1. (Currently Amended) An exposure method, comprising the steps of:

~~closely contacting, to a workpiece, a preparing an exposure mask having an opening formed with lengthwise directions extending in orthogonal directions;~~  
~~contacting the exposure mask to a workpiece;~~  
~~detecting one of the lengthwise directions of the opening; and~~  
~~projecting, onto the mask, exposure light being that is polarized in a direction other than the directions mentioned above of an angle of approximately 45° with respect to the lengthwise directions of the opening.~~

2. to 3. (Cancelled)

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the ~~mask has an opening formed~~ opening of the exposure mask is formed with lengthwise directions extending only in mutually orthogonal directions.

5. (Withdrawn) An exposure mask, comprising:

a mask base material supported by a substrate and being effective to

transmit exposure light therethrough;

    a light blocking film formed on the mask base material and being effective to block the exposure light; and  
    an opening formed in the light blocking film and having its lengthwise directions extending in mutually orthogonal directions.

6. (Withdrawn) An exposure mask according to Claim 5, further comprising a mark formed in the light blocking film, which mark bears information regarding the lengthwise direction of the opening.

7. (Withdrawn) An exposure apparatus based on near-field light, comprising:

    light source means for emitting light to illuminate a mask having an opening formed with lengthwise directions extending in orthogonal directions; and  
    a polarization system disposed between the mask and said light source means, for polarizing the light in a direction other than the directions mentioned above.

8. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to Claim 7, further comprising a detecting system for detecting the lengthwise direction of the opening, wherein said detecting system includes polarization control means for controlling the polarization direction of the light at an angle of 45° with respect to the lengthwise direction of the opening, on the basis of the detection made by said detecting system.

9. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein the mask has an opening formed only in mutually orthogonal directions.

10. (Withdrawn) An exposure apparatus, comprising:  
a mask as recited in Claim 5 or 6; and  
projecting means for projecting, to the mask, light having a polarization direction with an angle of approximately 45° with respect to the lengthwise direction of the opening formed in the mask.

11. (Withdrawn) In an exposure apparatus based on near-field light, the improvements residing in circularly polarized light projecting means for projecting, onto a mask having an opening formed with lengthwise directions extending in plural directions, exposure light having a circularly polarized component.

12. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to Claim 11, wherein said circularly polarized light projecting means includes a light source unit for emitting light having a polarization component of circular polarization.

13. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to Claim 11, wherein said circularly polarized light projecting means includes a light source unit for projecting light having a polarization component of linear polarization, and a converting element for

converting the linear polarization component of the light into a circular polarization component.

14. (Withdrawn) An apparatus according to Claim 11, wherein said circularly polarized light projecting means includes a light source unit for projecting light having a random polarization component, a first converting element for converting the random polarization component of the light into a predetermined linear polarization component, and a second converting element for converting the predetermined linear polarization component into a circular polarization component.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Withdrawn) A device manufacturing method, comprising the steps of: exposing a workpiece by use of an exposure apparatus as recited in any one of Claims 7 to 9 and 11 to 14; and performing a predetermined process to the exposed workpiece.

17. (New) A method according to Claim 1, wherein said step of detecting one of the lengthwise directions of the opening is performed on the basis of an index mark that bears information for the detection of said one of the lengthwise directions of the opening.

18. (New) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the exposure light is emitted from a laser.